

# Small Farmer Initiative Program

*South Carolina*

*FY 2005 Guidelines*



*June 2005*

## Purpose

The purpose of this initiative is to improve technical services and program participation in all USDA programs through improved outreach efforts to Small Scale and Limited Resource Farmers. The target audience is defined as small farmers who have historically not participated in or never ranked high enough to receive financial assistance. We must be innovative in allowing small farmers to select practices that are best suited for their particular operations, while at the same time, considering affordability, effectiveness, and practicality for small farms to implement and maintain.

**In developing and implementing this technical and outreach initiative in South Carolina, NRCS technical practices and programs for Small Scale and Limited Resource Farmers will help break through potential barriers to participation in USDA programs.**

## Issue

There is an ongoing national and state concern over the low participation by small farmers in Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm Bill Programs.

## Background on the Initiative

### **USDA ANNOUNCES \$6 MILLION FOR NEW SMALL-SCALE/LIMITED RESOURCE FARMERS INITIATIVE**

*New Initiative is Available in 11 States Including South Carolina*

On March 16, 2005, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced that NRCS would provide up to \$6 million for a new Small-Scale/Limited Resource Farmers Initiative to help small farmers implement good conservation practices on their land.

NRCS Chief Bruce I. Knight made the official announcement in Columbia, South Carolina. This initiative will allow NRCS to help small scale / limited resource farmers move further down the road toward overcoming barriers they face in reaching conservation goals. A USDA Small Farmer Liaison position was established in South Carolina to provide needed technical assistance to small farmers. The Small Farmer Initiative is a direct result of the efforts of United Farmers USA, Inc., (led by President Hezekiah Gibson) and ongoing efforts to strengthen small farm operations and help them to survive across the nation.

NRCS offices in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and the Caribbean Area will each dedicate up to \$500,000 in program funds for the initiative, which will help increase participation in USDA voluntary conservation programs through improved outreach efforts to limited resource farmers.

**For the South Carolina Small Farmer Initiative, a limited resource farmer is defined as a farmer who is financially challenged.**

## Eligibility

Funds will help **farmers with 100 acres or less of cropland or pastureland** implement conservation practices. **Applicants with pastureland** must be willing to follow a prescribed grazing plan.

**A limited resource farmer** is defined as a small farmer who is financially challenged.

**To be eligible, applicants must be willing to plant at least 10 percent of the cropland acres to alternative crops.** *Note: Alternative crops are not traditional crops such as cotton, soybeans, rice, grain sorghum, field corn, wheat, or similar crops grown on large acreage and produced for off-farm sales.*

**Contracts will be limited to \$10,000. Cost-share rates will be up to 90 percent for all practices.**

All participants **must be registered in the Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS)** or grant permission to be registered in SCIMS.

**The resource concerns to be addressed in South Carolina are:**

- *Surface Water Quality – runoff of nutrients and organics*
- *Water Quantity – water management and irrigation*
- *Soil Quality – erosion control above soil loss tolerance (T) with wind and or water*

**2005 average state cost will be used when developing contracts.** When practice cost is not available for the cost of installing a conservation practice, at least two written estimates will be required when and if actual cost of work is used. It is recommended that NRCS be flexible in allowing the landowner to decide which items to be cost shared with the funds in their contracts.

**Nutrient and pest management and record keeping will be required for all conservation plans.** There will be an incentive payment of \$500/year for three years of the five years of the contract period.

All contract participants should attend and provide documentation that a recent farm record management training class has been completed. Clemson Extension can provide this training.

**Conservation tillage (no-till) is an allowable cost share practice** because the adoption rate in South Carolina is considered extremely low for small farmers. The practice is eligible as a continuous long term no-till system.

Existing field office technical standards are available to accomplish conservation planning for this small farm initiative.

If the applicant has an existing 2005 EQIP application and would like to be considered for this initiative, contact the local NRCS district conservationist for more information.

As needed, NRCS will develop and apply innovative and cost effective technical standards according to policy and place in the field office technical guide.

**Funding determination will be made August 1, 2005.**

**Conservation plans and contracts will be written by September 1, 2005.**

**The sign-up in South Carolina runs from  
June 20—July 22, 2005**